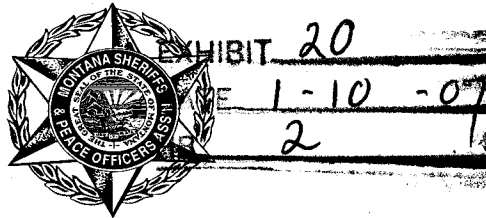


PRESIDENT
Cheryl Liedle
Helena, MT 59601
(406) 447-8235

PAST PRESIDENT
Tom Skinner
Forsyth, MT 59327
(406) 346-2715



SECRETARY-TREASURER
Tony Harbaugh
1010 Main Street
Miles City, MT 59301
Office: (406) 874-3320

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
34 West Sixth Ave.
Helena, MT 59601
Phone (406) 443-5669
Fax (406) 443-1592

Sheriffs & Peace Officers Association

November 27, 2006

Honorable Brian Schweitzer
Governor
State of Montana
Capitol Station
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Governor Schweitzer:

The Montana Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association has identified mental health funding and issues as a top priority for the 2007 Legislative Session. You won't be surprised, we're sure, that we become first line responders when members of our communities experience mental health crises. Without the necessary resources our communities are very limited in our abilities to do the right thing at the right time.

Our members participate in the Local Advisory Councils and interact with the Service Area Authorities. We wholeheartedly agree with the SAAs and endorse the following priorities:

- Increased funding for secure crisis beds in our communities.
- 72-hour presumptive eligibility for individuals in crisis.
- Increased funding for the Mental Health Services Plan.

We add one of our own: Funding for community mental health crisis teams.

You may not realize that at one time MHSP funding levels were sufficient enough to help communities maintain the State Hospital census at a much reduced level. During the Martz Administration's years, when many cuts were instituted, MHSP was drastically reduced and you see for yourself what happened to the State Hospital census. If we don't have the proper tools in our toolbox, we can't do the right thing for our communities' residents. We understand that returning MHSP funding to some semblance of its former status did not make it into your budget, but we hope that you will be amenable to having that discussion.

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We have come under some criticism because one of our responsibilities includes transportation of our mentally ill citizens, sometimes hundreds of miles. It is not a pleasant experience either for our residents or our officers. It is our contention that the solution is recognition that treatment of mental illness is best achieved by providing treatment resources close to home, therefore limiting transportation and all the issues that go with it.

Our Association looks forward to working with you and the 2007 Legislature to achieve the goals outlined in this letter.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

SHERIFF CHERYL LIEDLE
President